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TREE-PLANTING INCENTIVES
IN
THE AGRICULTURAL ACT OF 1956

The Agricultural Act of 1956, approved May 28, authorizes a Soil Bank (Title I) for the withdrawal from production of cropland as an immediate means for reducing crops in oversupply.

Authority for administering the Soil Bank, as well as other provisions of the act, is vested in the Secretary. In exercising this authority, the Secretary has delegated responsibilities to the various agencies of the Department and expects to secure the cooperation of State and local agencies, substantially as the Agricultural Conservation Program has operated for a number of years.

The Soil Bank includes an Acreage Reserve and a Conservation Reserve.

The Acreage Reserve authorizes contracts with the Secretary of Agriculture for the reduction of land used for the growing of certain crops in oversupply. The producer is compensated by payments to be determined by the Secretary of Agriculture.

The Conservation Reserve authorizes longer term agreements. It covers any cropland which the producer agrees to establish and maintain in an approved conservation practice. Provision is made for annual payments throughout the period of the contract, and substantial help in establishing the practice.

Acreage Reserve Requirements

The Acreage Reserve is authorized for the years 1956 through 1959. Within maximum and minimum limits set by the Secretary, and under administrative regulations for carrying out the provisions of the act, it permits landowners, or those having control of the land, to agree to reduce below their crop allotment or corn-base requirements, their acreage in production of cotton, wheat, rice and most types of peanuts and tobacco, and corn in the commercial corn-producing area. Land placed in the Acreage Reserve is in addition to any land placed in the Conservation Reserve.

To participate in the Acreage Reserve, the producer signs an agreement with his local Agricultural Stabilization and Conservation Committee designating the land to be reserved. On this land he agrees to keep down noxious weeds; not to harvest any crop from it; not to graze it through the contract period unless authorized to do so in an emergency, and to follow such other requirements as may be necessary and desirable to carry out the purposes of the act.

The Conservation Reserve

Any regularly used cropland (including land growing tame hay, alfalfa, and clovers, which do not require annual tillage) may be withdrawn from production and put in the Conservation Reserve. Conservation practices authorized by the law include establishment of vegetative cover, water-storage facilities, or other soil-, water-, wildlife-, or forest-conserving uses.

Agreements to participate in the Conservation Reserve may be signed with the county ASC committee at any time up to December 31, 1960. The term of the agreement will be not less than 3 years, and may not extend more than 10 years and, in any event, not later than December 31, 1969, except that contracts for the establishment of tree cover may extend for 15 years. They must be terminated by December 31, 1974. It has not been determined what the length of the average contract may be, though it has been considered that this average may run about 5 years for most practices, and 10 years for the establishment of tree-cover projects.

In entering land in the Conservation Reserve, the farmer agrees:

To devote to conserving crops or uses, or to allow to lie idle, an equivalent of the remaining acreage on the farm normally devoted to such uses.

Not to harvest any crop from the acreage put in the Conservation Reserve, excepting timber (in accordance with sound forestry management) and wildlife or other natural products which do not increase supplies of domestic feed.

Not to graze acreage established in vegetative cover prior to January 1, 1959, or any later date provided in the contract, unless authorized to do so in an emergency.

Not to adopt any practice or to divert any lands on the farm to any use which would tend to defeat the purposes of the contract.

In addition to the annual payment, the Secretary will agree, within maximum limitations, to bear such part of the cost of establishing and maintaining cover, water-storage facilities, or other approved conservation practice, as he deems necessary to effectuate the purpose of the act. This may include costs of labor and installation.

Conservation materials and services will be made available through the county ASC committee in much the same manner as has been done for a number of years under the Agricultural Conservation Program.

Coverage of the Act

The Agricultural Act of 1956 has six parts or titles. Title I is devoted to the authorization of the Soil Bank, embracing the Acreage Reserve, Subtitle A, and the Conservation Reserve, Subtitle B.

Title II deals with the disposal of surplus agricultural products and Title III covers marketing quotas and acreage allotments.

A plan for accelerating tree planting and reforestation through increased Federal assistance to State programs is offered in Title IV.

Title V makes special provisions for rice marketing and Title VI deals with miscellaneous matters, including soya beans and parity studies.

Tree Planting and Forestation--Title IV

The preamble to Title IV of the act takes note of the need for an adequate supply of industrial wood as a matter of national security and it points out that improving and protecting the more than 50-million acres of idle forest land in need of planting, as shown in the recent Timber Resource Review inventory, would add to the economic strength of the Nation and would bring increased public benefits from other values associated with forest cover.

In order to effectuate and stimulate a more rapid reforestation policy, the act authorizes State foresters, or equivalent officials, to formulate and submit plans for accelerated tree planting and reforestation of forest land in their States and to submit them to the Secretary of Agriculture for approval.

The Secretary is authorized to assist the States in carrying out approved plans, giving advice and technical assistance, and furnishing financial contributions. Where the plans include Federal lands with State or private lands, the Secretary will obtain the cooperation and assistance of the Federal agency affected in carrying out the plan. Except for expenditures on Federal lands, the financial contribution of the Federal Government may not exceed the amount expended by the State for the same purposes during the same fiscal year.

Facilities Being Reviewed

In the light of the new legislation, the Forest Service and State foresters are now reviewing existing plans and programs, considering the anticipated stepped-up demand for nursery stock and for technical assistance in the planting and management of new plantations. In some cases, nursery facilities will have to be expanded substantially and provision will have to be made for extending technical services, if and as required.

The Agricultural Act of 1956 does not supplant existing legislation in this field nor is it intended to detract from the tree-planting work carried out under Section 4 of the Clarke-McNary Act of 1924 and the Agricultural Conservation Program.





